

*Highly Structured Tourist Art:
Form and Meaning of the Polynesian
Cultural Center*

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In 1993 the Polynesian Cultural Center in Lā'ie, Hawai'i, celebrated its thirtieth anniversary. It opened on 12 October 1963. Since then, the center has become one of Hawai'i's most popular paid attractions. It has also ignited controversy as anthropologists, curators, and even Internal Revenue Service investigators have assailed its commercialism, arguing that it is not a center for culture, but a tourist trap. But culture or kitsch, intentional or unwitting, the center's attractions form an unsuspected yet distinctive aesthetic composition. The center's overlooked aesthetic, however, is supplied not by any Polynesian tradition, but by Mormonism.

Established by the Mormon church, the center is a forty-acre ethnic theme park. Its paved walkways wind through immaculate grounds, gift shops, refreshment stands, a 2800-seat amphitheater, a hangar-sized restaurant, and seven landscaped settings billed as "authentic reproductions" of traditional Polynesian villages (PCC 1982, np).¹ Each village is equipped with replicas of traditional Polynesian dwellings and a staff of costumed "islanders" who demonstrate Polynesian arts, crafts, and customs daily. Most of these "villagers" are Polynesian students at Brigham Young University—Hawai'i, whose campus adjoins the center grounds and which is also owned by the Mormon church. With youthful humor, these villagers present an idyll of Polynesia that evokes popular preconceptions of the unspoiled, uncomplicated life of the islands where natives still live in grass shacks. Each evening after the villages close, the center presents its celebrated stage extravaganza of Polynesian song and dance, commonly called the "night show." At the center, tourists pay about forty dollars each to see "the islands as you always hoped they would be" (PCC 1987, np).



PHOTO 1. The PCC villages in the mid-1970s, shortly after completion of the Marquesan *tohua*, lower left. Construction on the Gateway Restaurant has begun, upper right. The plot for the new Pacific Pavilion is across the bridge just beyond the construction. The much smaller theater where the night show was originally held is the wing-shaped structure just to the right of the construction. (Courtesy Brigham Young University—Hawai'i Archives)

TOURISM AND ART

The center, or "PCC,"² calls itself a "living museum" that "preserves and portrays the cultures, arts and crafts of Polynesia" (PCC 1987, np; 1992, np). Not surprisingly, however, the PCC has drawn the type of criticism that anthropologists often level at art and so-called cultural establishments that cater to tourists. According to Graburn, the PCC ranks among "the most superficial" of cultural presentations in the Pacific (1983, 77). Brameld and Matsuyama find the PCC filled with "half-truths" resulting from its incongruous mixing of what was typical of traditional Polynesia

and what is typical of Polynesia currently (1977, 62). Stanton agrees that the PCC has a serious period inconsistency and observes that, while it presents performing arts and material culture, the PCC stages “fake cultures” from which traditional Polynesian worldviews, social organizations, and religions are “painfully absent” (1989, 252, 254). Other anthropologists have called the PCC “anthropological science fiction” (quoted anonymously in Stanton 1977, 230) and “the Mormon zoo” (pers comm, 1991).

Anthropologists have been stern in their criticism of the inferior execution common in art produced for tourists and other outsiders as compared to older, traditional arts. According to Fagg, for example, “Tourist art . . . is not art in any proper sense, but more or less mechanically produced Kitsch, or trashy souvenirs for the less sophisticated traveler” (1969, 45). As early as 1927, Boas observed that native arts suffer “rapid decay in the beauty of form” under European influence (1955 [1927], 149).

Sensing that this is not quite true, however, a few anthropologists have taken a different view of tourist art. According to Altman, some tourist art

is valid as art in its own right, although it is art of acculturation. . . . Some of the kinds or details of commercially-made objects may be expressive of cultural values as well as of the demands of the trade. The study of tourist art in the widest sense of the term might contribute to the understanding of the process of acculturation, artistic innovation, of the personality of the artist, et al. (1961, 356)

And Megaw states,

One may dismiss derogatory views of Aboriginal “tourist” artifacts, the literally all-plastic “reconstructions” of Polynesia to be found on Broadway as well as Waikiki Beach, as saying again much about our perceptions of indigenous cultures and nothing whatsoever about the legitimate demands of transitional art. (1986, 66)

In reality, then, tourist art should be examined not as a degradation of some earlier style, but as a distinct social and aesthetic phenomenon. The term “tourist art” is neutral; “authenticity,” which is a measure of stylistic similarity to earlier art productions, matters little, if at all, in the study of tourist art in its social context. Tourist art is distinguished not by its form,

origins, execution, or content, but by its intended audience, along with the economic intentions of its producers and the use to which they put their wares; in other words, by its function. In simple terms, tourist art is art that is produced for tourists, regardless of any other formal or symbolic considerations. Tourist art is based to one degree or another on a resemblance to local traditional forms, but it functions as objects to be sold to or exchanged with tourists as souvenirs, mementos, or entertainment.

That the art produced at the PCC is unquestionably tourist art is clear from its primary audience—tourists—and its purpose, which is to generate revenue from the tourists to support BYU—Hawai'i (Stanton 1989, 248; 1982, 5; Britsch 1986, 188). This support comes in the form of wages for students employed at the center and as outright gifts. By 1982 the center was donating over \$1 million yearly to the university for unrestricted use (Stanton 1982, 5). By 1985 the center's financial commitment to the university was \$2.5 million (Rodgers 1984, np). And although the center enjoys a nonprofit status, its recent revenues total tens of millions of dollars each year (Yoneyama 1989, 112).

Beneath the commercialism, however, a formal structure unifies the center's attractions into a single, complex work of tourist art. The form of the center follows a pattern of theme and variation that lends itself well to the center's meanings, which are laden with Mormon doctrine. At first, the intrusion of the Mormon doctrine might not seem remarkable, but the center remains a coherent work of tourist art, with an identifiable structure and a genuine aesthetic.

This study will present an interpretation, in the words of Megaw, legitimately demanded by the PCC as a meaningful work of tourist art. The study combines anthropological methods of observation with principles of philosophical aesthetics to introduce an interpretation of the PCC that goes beyond the continuing controversy over its commercialism. As a complex work of tourist art, the PCC offers new insight into the anthropological approach to all tourist art as a form of aesthetic expression.

In this study, the Marquesan exhibit is particularly important. Intended by its designers to be a somber monument to a Polynesian culture they thought to be dead, the exhibit supplied the poignancy that fired the PCC's aesthetic charge and clinched identification of the center's form and meaning with other grand examples of Mormon expression. That the Mar-

quesan exhibit recently replaced its somberness with lively, tourist-pleasing activities throws water on the tonal shift, compromises the center's aesthetic, and muddies its reflection of other Mormon expression. On a broader level, that change also aptly demonstrates that while tourist art is capable of carrying deep social meanings, it suffers from fragility in its rush to woo an audience.

Center officials assert that the Marquesan exhibit is more authentic now than when it opened in 1975 and follows their discovery that Marquesan society really is not dead after all, but has actually flourished in its home islands. But the gaudiness of the PCC's new Marquesan program makes it emblematic of the entire PCC, where the aesthetic is always suspended delicately between the center's commercial purpose and its disputed claims of traditional authenticity. Indeed the aesthetic of the PCC is independent of economics and authenticity. It is a deeper structure, an unacknowledged, less visible message. The center has seen many artistic changes since its opening, but each was a transition, and through them the aesthetic has emerged stronger. It will no doubt survive the Marquesan "renaissance," because the PCC, after all, is a cultural artifact and as such reflects the society that created it, in this case the Mormons.

This study of the PCC as a single, coherent work of tourist art includes the transitions of the Marquesan exhibit. But the study focuses on that exhibit's precommercialization phase just past, when its contribution to the center's aesthetic was the most eloquent and made the center a most vivid example of the Mormon idiom.

THE GROUNDS

The PCC has two main parts so distinct that the center seems to be two separate attractions. One is the village track, occupying half of the oblong grounds, where simple programs are presented amid traditional-looking Polynesian dwellings. At the other end of the grounds is the Pacific Pavilion theater, in which the famed night show is presented. The most striking differences between the two parts are format and spectacle. The villages and their programs are simple and leisurely paced. They involve audience participation. The villagers are very accessible and mingle with the tourists, joking and chatting. Village programs use relatively few performers and take place during the day in the open air.



PHOTO 2. The entire Polynesian Cultural Center and the adjoining Brigham Young University—Hawai'i campus in the late 1970s. (*Courtesy Brigham Young University—Hawai'i Archives*)

The night show, in contrast, is an elaborately choreographed stage production. Costumes are lavish; music is prerecorded, loud, and symphonic; the lighting likewise is orchestrated. The dances are performed by a large cast in a chorus-line fashion. As in any large stage production, audience participation is not possible, and the cast cannot mingle with the viewers except to wave and shake a few hands after the finale.

Tourists enter the PCC through the main gate in front of the Gateway Restaurant, squarely between the villages and the Pavilion. Gift shops, snack bars, and other concessions are also located in this area, which physically divides the center into its two main parts. The Pavilion is not even noticeable from the villages.

Behind the restaurant, a lagoon threads from the Pavilion to the villages. The lagoon gives variety to the center's landscaping and suggests the dependency of Polynesian societies on the sea. Tourists may glide through

the village area in double-hulled canoes that are not paddled but poled in the shallow water. The pole handlers entertain the tourists with jokes, splash other canoes as they pass in the narrows of the lagoon, and pretend to fall into the water to amuse their passengers.

The lagoon is a delightful diversion for the tourists. But because it represents the sea, its smallness and the nature of the activities staged there belie the vast distances between Polynesian societies. As such, the lagoon contributes to an impression conveyed throughout the center that the Polynesian cultures represented by the villages are very similar and very close (see Stanton 1989, 254).

The villages ring the lagoon close to the bank. This arrangement provides accessibility and continuity but again implies an unrealistic proximity between the Polynesian societies. The Pavilion is ringed by an arm of the lagoon to suggest its connection to the rest of the park, but here the lagoon has the look of a moat, fordable only across two bridges with the theater towering above. This isolation by water separates the night show even more from the villages.

The villages and the night show are also separated temporally. The night show does not begin until after the villages have closed and the tourists have eaten dinner in the Gateway. Although admission can be purchased just to the villages or the night show, the center encourages customers to arrive early in the afternoon, tour the villages, have dinner in the restaurant, and then attend the night show to get the full impact of all the center's attractions.

The separation of the night show from the villages accentuates it, making it stand out from the rest of the center. The night show becomes the center's culminating event, because it takes place after the villages close, making them a prelude. Directed by the villagers toward the Pavilion, the tourists leave the villages behind to attend the night show in a mass movement resembling a migration.

THE VILLAGES

Seven groups of structures that replicate native dwellings comprise the villages of the PCC. Each village is named for an island group likely to be familiar to tourists: Tahiti, Fiji, Hawai'i, Samoa, Tonga, and New Zealand (the Maori village). And even though it is not as likely to be

familiar to tourists, an exhibit from the Marquesan Islands is also included, and conspicuously so, on a high mound of dark, brooding stones. Each village includes a predictable assortment of structures, such as a "chief's house," a family dwelling, a meetinghouse, or a house of learning.

The village structures appear authentic, but in the words of one villager from Western Samoa,³

The shape of those huts are authentic-looking from the outside. When you go inside, they're not. In the inside of those huts, they're using the coconut leaves. Between the outside thatched roof and the inside coconut leaves, in between there are plywood. But, you know, we don't use those materials in Samoa. Plywoods and coconut leaves inside. But in Samoa, we almost cover the whole huts with small, long, tiny sticks from the top coming down on top of the posts. [This] looks more beautiful, and they're all tied together using sennit rope. And that makes the Samoan hut looks more beautiful inside instead of looking at those coconut leaves woven inside [that] they have at the Polynesian Center. A lot of other Samoans, especially Samoan chiefs from Samoa, when they look at it, they don't like it, to tell you the truth, because it's not authentic. I think we need to correct that. And not only that, the other thing is the chief's house over there. It's nice, it's big, but the foundation is very low. Chiefs' houses—the foundations are very high in Samoa. Chiefs always like to be higher than anybody else.

The villages are the settings for songs, dances, demonstrations, lectures, and other exchanges between the tourists and the villagers. The villages operate from early afternoon until about 6:00 PM, when the tourists are expected to proceed to the Gateway for the buffet dinner. The following sample village schedules are from a PCC brochure (PCC 1987, np).

Tahitian Village Activities and Times

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Drumming | 2:00, 5:45 |
| Drumming lessons | 2:00, 2:45, 3:30, 4:15, 5:00 |
| Dance lessons | 2:15, 3:00, 3:45, 4:30, 5:15 |
| Historical lecture | 3:15, 4:45 |
| Food preparation | 2:15, 3:00, 3:45, 4:30, 5:15 |
| Fishing techniques | 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 4:00, 4:30, 5:00, 5:30 |
| Tahitian farewell | 5:45 |

Samoa Village Activities and Times

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Chiefly greeting | 2:15 |
| Firemaking | 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 4:30, 5:00, 5:30 |
| Coconut husking | 2:45, 3:15, 3:45, 4:15, 4:45, 5:15 |
| Village maiden and Chief's lecture | 3:00, 4:00, 5:00 |
| Tree climbing | 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 4:30, 5:00, 5:30 |
| Drumming | 2:00, 5:45 |
| Samoa Farewell | 5:45 |

Although schedules change from time to time, the village programs are very similar in content. Aside from differences in costuming and a few culture-specific activities, a program from one village could easily play in any other. The programs mix daily activities, such as food preparation, games, and plaiting, with typical touristic fare—dancing, drumming, and shell-blowing. Demonstrations are brief; most promote audience participation. The villagers, with few exceptions, are young and energetic. Of the hula demonstrations in the Hawaiian village, one Hawaiian student said,

It was good, except after teaching the same hula countless times ["Along the Beach at Waikīkī"], it gets kind of boring. It was just a haole hula. It was in English, and all it does is talk about the beach at Waikīkī, how there's romance waiting there. They [the tourists] really enjoyed it—a lot of picture taking, a lot of laughter because they have to swivel their hips. We have maybe five or ten minutes with them.

The lectures omit many details of traditional Polynesian life and religion that would conflict with Mormonism or detract from the carefree aura of island life. Another villager said,

Because of the church standards and the church beliefs, we can only show so much of the culture. We cannot show the things that would conflict with the church, such things as "black magic" that they did, even a lot of the costumes that they wear have to conform to church standards as much as possible. If you go to Waikīkī and you see the shows, a lot of the times they wear hardly anything at all. For somebody who never saw a show in town, they'd say that maybe some of our dancers, the way they're dressed, they might not [approve]. But if you go into town it's a lot worse. And I'm not saying that just because it's

a lot worse in town that we can do it here, but culturally the costumes that we wear are close. Sometimes it's not as close as it should be because of the restrictions that the church has on it. And at that point the culture kind of takes a back seat to the way of the church.

The villages entertain tourists with the convenient illusion that they can visit "all of Polynesia, all in one place" (PCC 1992, np). The current general manager says the PCC is the only place where tourists can see all the Polynesian islands without actually going to them (Lynch 1992).

This superficiality blurs distinctions between Polynesian societies and gives the impression that these societies are only variations of a single social pattern. Polynesia appears as the tourists expected—a buoyant, timeless life-style, free from the ills of hectic, modern society. In a paradisiacal setting of shimmering lagoons and swaying palms, youthful Polynesians attend to carefree, casual activities while joying in the exotic diversions of hula and drumming.

THE MARQUESAN *TOHUA*

Although the carefully researched Marquesan exhibit recently implemented a program much like those of the other villages, it was designed to be the sole exception to this charming pattern and a monument to culture loss. Opened in 1975 as part of an expansion project, the exhibit is not really a "village" at all, but a replica of a Marquesan *tohua* that existed on the island of Nuku Hiva (PCC nd, np). Typically, a *tohua* was a ceremonial compound surrounded by houses built on elevated stone platforms. It was the setting for feasts, dancing, tattooing, and most other ceremonies (Dening 1980, 46, 58).

When the center's Marquesan compound opened, its activities were a striking contrast to those of the other villages. The same 1987 program from which the above village schedules were taken lists only the following activities for the *tohua*:

| | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Food preparation | 2:30, 3:15, 4:00, 4:45, 5:30 |
| Historical lecture | 2:45, 3:30, 4:15, 5:00 |
| Legend telling | 2:15, 3:00, 3:45, 4:30, 5:15 |

The activities listed on a brochure that appeared a year earlier were even more spare: "Lecture and singing: 2:30, 3:30, 4:30" (PCC 1986, np).

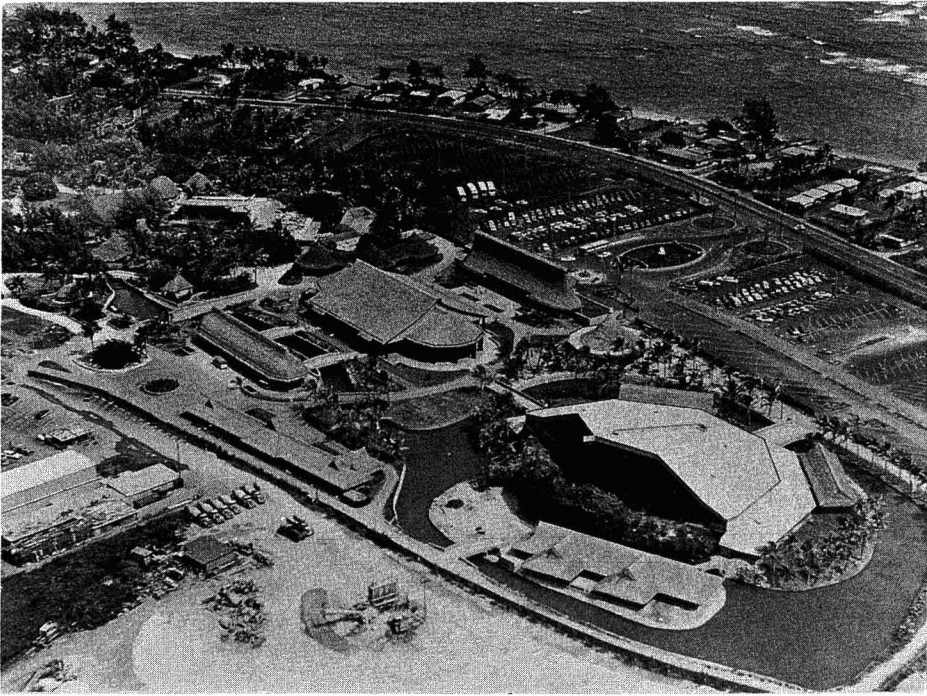


PHOTO 3. The completed Pacific Pavilion about 1976, at the opposite end of the center from the villages and the Marquesan exhibit. (*Courtesy Brigham Young University—Hawai'i Archives*)

And an earlier script prepared for Marquesan exhibit workers shortly after the *tohua* opened contained the following:

This *tohua* will have only two greeters to stand at the entrances and welcome the people. They will explain about the *tohua* and the Marquesan islands. The village or *tohua* itself will have no guides or lectures. In this way guests can take a self-guided walk through the *tohua* and we will not be making the mistake of having people think that guides in the village are from Marquesas or that things going on inside the *tohua* are authentic Marquesan. Inside the *tohua* well written and simple signs will explain about the important parts of the *tohua*. For some larger groups a guide could walk through the *tohua* with them and read or talk about each of the important parts, but for the most part let the guests just walk though in silence. (PCC nd, np)

The greeters' remarks from the same script were, "You will notice we have no guides inside to give you demonstrations of Marquesan life as you have

seen in the other villages. This will remind you that a once great and proud race of people is almost forgotten and extinct."

The number of activities presented in the Marquesan exhibit have increased its liveliness since it opened. Originally, this exhibit was to evoke in the tourists a somber reverence quite different from the gaiety packed into the other villages. Because the *tohua* is located at one end of the center, tourists had to travel through several villages before reaching it and then through the rest after exiting. Thus they passed from gaiety, through somberness, and then returned to gaiety in an A-B-A formal structure.

THE NIGHT SHOW

At the extreme opposite end of the grounds from the Marquesan *tohua* is the Pacific Pavilion, stage of the night show. Since the center opened, there have been several versions of the night show, reflecting the center's desire to provide fresh attractions for its audiences, but the form has remained basically the same. Each show is a sequence of "sets," one from each of the island groups represented in the center, except the Marquesas.

Each set is composed of several songs and dances that may enact events from history, genealogy, and legend, or portray preparations for battle. Many of the selections describe activities such as welcoming guests, playing games, fishing, food planting and preparation, making tapa cloth from tree bark, husking coconuts, and making leis. The audience encountered these same activities in the villages; the reiteration in the night show establishes audience recognition and a formal link between the center's two main parts. The repetition also establishes a thematic conformity in that both the villages and the night show are mainly concerned with casual activities of everyday life. The following describes a 1968 night-show set:

Tahiti

A Rutu Te Pahu—The compelling and tantalizing beat of Tahiti's famous drums accompanies this Otea describing the love the Tahitians have for their beautiful island.

Torea: Boy's Otea—Tahitian men perform this Otea with pride as they tell the women of their great strength.

Vahine Paumotu: Aparima—A Tahitian boy falls in love with a young maiden from the island of Paumotu. "Aparima" means a dance performed in a sitting position.

Hivinau or Paoa—An exciting circle dance featuring a highly-skilled native girl, who has been chosen to entertain the villagers. (PCC 1968, np)

The following describes a set from the current night show:

Samoa

The happy people of Samoa pay energetic homage to the *mana*—the inner strength—they derive from their traditions and heads of families.

Lauga—Wearing the centuries-old symbols of their office—the bark cloth wraparound, pandanus lei, the staff and fly whisk—talking chiefs welcome all to enjoy the talents of the Samoan people.

Le 'Ava Sasa—Young village maidens and their attendants reenact the ceremonial preparation and distribution of the kava drink.

Taualuga—A special number always done by the daughter of a high chief. For this occasion she wears the ornate *tuiga* or royal headdress decorated with feathers and light-colored human hair as well as a dress made with leaves.

Lapalapa—The dancers use dried coconut branches to help them concentrate on the rhythm of the synchronized movements. During World War II many soldiers were stationed in the islands and Samoans used split palm fronds to imitate their manual of arms and slapping sounds.

Savali Afi (Fire Walk)—Three young men literally play and dance with fire in this humorous test of bravery.

Ma'ulu'ulu—This high energy group dance, done in perfect unison, encourages the young men and women to look to their futures, to stand for truth and fight for freedom.

Fa'ataupati—A traditional dance where young men compete to see who can keep up in creating various agile movements and loud slapping sounds.

Siva Nifo 'Oti Afi—The spectacular Samoan fire knife dance is an unforgettable display of the athletic prowess and incredible daring of the dancers (PCC 1993, np).

The night-show dancers are mostly young Polynesians, like the villagers, and wear costumes of the islands they represent. But here the costumes are ornate, the dances exuberant. The night show expresses the infectious vitality, joyousness, and dazzling physical beauty that are popularly associated with the Pacific Islands and restates the village portrayals of youthful, carefree Polynesian energy. But here these traits are accented with spectacle and grand staging.

The finale features the full cast—as many as 150 dancers on stage. They are still dressed in the full costumes of the different Polynesian cultures, but they sing a common song. The finale mixes the several cultures, dis-

pensing finally with the separate-set format and merging all the cultures into one. In this song again, all the island groups are blended together, giving the day's strongest and final impression of the uniformity behind Polynesian diversity. Pounding drums and exuberant dances remind the tourists of their own storied preconceptions of the islands, leaving them with the impression that Polynesia is after all just as they had always hoped it would be.

Centuries of divergent paths to social evolution are lost in the mingling of the separate cultures. Polynesia is indeed beautiful, carefree, and ever-youthful. The sorrow and the lessons to be learned from the dreadful loss of entire societies is replaced by the resounding liveliness of young and talented Polynesians who make it seem that the lost and the dead have returned to life and vitality. One of the narrator's fanciful lines in the 1987 show was "My culture is strong, as strong as rock and reef, as strong as pounding surf, as strong as mighty people standing through the winds of change. Different somehow, and yet still Hawai'i."

To heighten the spectacle of the performances, the night show has come to depend on staging and special effects including prerecorded vocal and orchestral music; lip synchronization to recorded lyrics; sophisticated sound and lighting systems; prerecorded narration that idealizes Polynesia's cultures; stage effects such as a jet fountain water curtain and simulated volcanic eruptions; a symphonic score to accompany Hawaiian chants; and specialty numbers, songs, and other music written by non-Polynesians, including a Disney studio composer and even Henry Mancini (Ferre 1988, 166). One performer in the Hawaiian set stated,

A lot of the kids were against it because they had a lot of taped music. It was the first time they had that type of thing. When I first started [at the PCC] the music was all live music. But now in this one, you had the background [music] kind of like a melodrama in the background. You have the guys [musicians] on stage, but you have all this orchestra in the back to bring it up. And they also had a couple numbers where the people didn't sing at all. They lip-synced. And so a lot of the kids frowned on it. They have a soloist at the beginning, which he has to lip-sync. They say it's more Hollywoodish.

Despite differences in format, location, and timing, the formal division of the night show into sets and its motif of Polynesian domesticity echo the villages and their less elaborate programs. As such, the night show is a familiar refrain. Polynesia is fun and carefree.

In the night show, however, Polynesians as portrayed in the center's villages are lifted to a higher admiration by the tourists. In the night show, the unaffected, clever villagers are presented as polished performers, reputedly superior to any other Polynesian troupe in the world (PCC 1987, np). Simplicity is transformed into excellence.

The night-show sets reiterate the villages, but with stunning elaboration. The night show recalls the villages and parades them in the Pacific Pavilion, but the elaborate staging makes the common, casual village activities sublime. Even warfare is transformed into an engaging, harmless pantomime. The night show blends the several Polynesian cultures in a production that depicts the fabled friendliness, vigor, and simplicity of Pacific Islanders. The Marquesans are conspicuously, hauntingly absent. If the tourists are to believe the PCC night show, there is no more trouble in Paradise.

CLOSURE AND FORMAL UNITY

The compositional elements of any artwork are identifiable because points of closure articulate them from each other. Thus the compositional elements create contrast and variety in the content of the piece. In any masterful artwork, however, the variety expressed in its contrasting elements must somehow become balanced and unified. Meyer, speaking of musical composition, observes,

Every composition, then, exhibits a hierarchy of closures. The more decisive the closure at a particular point, the more important the structural articulation. Or, the structure of a composition is something which we infer from the hierarchy of closures which it presents. A composition continues—is mobile and on-going—partly because of the tendency of parameters to act independently of one another, to be noncongruent. (1973, 89)

If the PCC is actually a single, unified, formal construction and not a loose assortment of curiosities, it must consist of aesthetic elements, each of which must possess its own points of closure and at the same time connect with every other element in a formal and thematic way to preserve aesthetic unity.

When the PCC is viewed as a single artwork, a closure hierarchy appears within villages, between villages, and between the villages and the night show. The *tititorea* stick game in the Maori village, for instance, con-

cludes in the tourists' laughter; the guide thanks them for visiting and directs them to the Fijian village; a tourist couple exits the village area to join the line waiting to be seated in the Gateway Restaurant; a crowd crosses the stone bridge to the Pacific Pavilion to witness the night show. These points of closure articulate components of the center's structure that provide aesthetic variety in the Polynesian Cultural Center as an artwork.

The PCC achieves unity between its aesthetic elements, even its principal and most distinct divisions, the villages and the night show, in a number of ways. These include the youthfulness of the performers, the quotidian, domestic subject matter of the songs and dances, and, most important, the repetition of Polynesia's legendary simplicity and innocence.

Another unification device is the progressive, dramatic sequence of attractions and activities, starting in the villages, with their A-B-A form, and ending with the night show and its glorious refrain of the day's activities. Tourists journey through a Polynesia of grass huts, experiencing joyousness, a sense of sorrow and loss, and then a return of gaiety. Then they are gathered, literally and symbolically, from those homey circumstances to the polished, extravagant Polynesia of the night show as the humble villages fade with the sunset.

Even the severe spatial and temporal divisions between the night show and the villages, which first seemed a disruption, serve to articulate and emphasize the contrast between them and to heighten the aesthetic interest and satisfaction the center delivers as a complex work of art: the treatment of the subject matter remains the same, despite the startling difference in theatricality; the participants are uniformly charming and zestful; the uncomplicated buoyancy of Polynesia persists.

FLAT HIERARCHIES

In other arts, a formal structure that restates a common theme throughout its several components has been called a "flat hierarchy" (Meyer 1973, 93-96). In such compositions, formal sections are related in terms of parallelism and conformity to a common idea. A familiar example of a flat hierarchy is a musical composition that employs a theme and variation method of organization. In addition to being parallel, the sections of a flat hierarchy are additive. In a musical theme and variation composition, for instance, the variations add characteristics such as dynamic or tempo

changes, key modulations, or greater complexity to give an interesting or pleasing variety to the renditions of the theme, whose repeated appearance maintains the unity of the entire piece.

Speaking of musical theme and variation compositions, Meyer observes that because a musical theme is a "closed" figure displaying an integral unity in itself, the series of development sections that follows "lacks an internally structured point of probable termination. The number of parts is variable—many or few—depending upon the ingenuity of the composer, the taste of the time, and the patience of the audience" (1973, 95). He adds that the nature of the variations may also be controlled in other ways, "for instance, in terms of some set of key relationships—as in the Well-Tempered Clavier, the suite, or the symphony; or in terms of a text—as in a strophic song. In this last case, the text may provide syntactic connections which the music itself lacks" (1973, 95).

This last quote describes the PCC. It is a flat hierarchy like a strophic song whose "text" is the tourists' expectations about the exotic simplicity of Polynesia. The villages conform to these expectations by portraying Polynesian societies as being more alike than different. They present the cultures of Polynesia as a uniformity of domesticity, vibrant but repetitive, and devoid of social turmoil and superstition. Each village is a variation of these qualities, slightly different in costuming, activities, and other additive features, but clearly recognizable. The night show, though using a different format, is nonetheless the final climactic variation, with an additive formula of elaborate staging and choreography to enhance the entertainment value and further gratify the audience.

FORM AND MEANING OF THE PCC

If the form of the PCC as a work of art is theme and variation, the question then becomes, What exactly is the overall meaning of the PCC, the idea of which the villages and the night show are variations? Is it only that Polynesia, beneath its exotic, joyous surface is finally and predictably shallow, simple, and quotidian?

The answer becomes clear by again considering the Marquesan exhibit, which is the antithesis of the night show but still very much a variation of it. The *tohua* presents a reconstruction of the material remains of a Polynesian culture that nearly succumbed to European diseases and intertribal warfare (Denning 1980). Unlike the other PCC attractions, the Marquesan

exhibit was not to include demonstrations, dances, and songs. The staff there were to sport no ethnic costumes and were not to engage the visitors in humorous exchanges. The activities were primarily lectures and myth-telling. The mood was meant to be quiet and respectful.

The minimalism of the PCC's *tohua* anticipated some anthropologists (eg, Rowntree and Conkie 1980; Handsman 1982; Leone 1983, 1987) who argue that any type of restoration or reconstruction cannot help but be infused with contemporary attitudes and suppositions. Leone observes that "a historical presentation's authenticity is fundamentally compromised because the presentation is always made for the immediate moment" (1983, 31). Elsewhere he states that even a museum

is itself an artifact. As an artifact it has two qualities. One is that it reflects, as all artifacts must, the society and individuals responsible for creating it. This is of course ourselves and our contemporaries, in this case. The second quality an artifact has is its active nature. The artifact teaches, shapes, forms, reforms, disciplines and instructs. Artifacts not only reflect on us, they help shape us. (1987, 1)

To present the past with the greatest possible integrity, Leone recommends a minimum of interpretation in the reconstruction of an artifact. To do otherwise is to perpetuate myths. He urges that historic presentations not project contemporary preconceptions and categories onto another society that may have had a different operational framework entirely.

The designers of the Marquesan exhibit at the PCC were somewhat sensitive to these same issues. But their attempt to minimize tourist misconceptions about the Marquesans was far from devoid of interpretative implications. Their selectivity produced a genre of domesticity matching that already portrayed in the villages. The *tohua* includes replicas of a chief's house, a tattooing house, a women's building, a cooking house, and others similar in purpose to those found in the other villages. The domestic activities that are performed in the other villages are comparable to those described by the *tohua* signs and scripts. But this exhibit was to be minimally staffed, with the Marquesans' drunkenness, ferocious tribal warfare, cannibalism, and cold-bloodedness unacknowledged, even though these factors certainly contributed to their demise (see Dening 1980). Such omissions in the center's presentation served to extend the frivolity of the other villages to the absent Marquesans, making them appear as another light-hearted Polynesian people, but in this case destroyed.

Structurally, therefore, the somber and deserted Marquesan *tohua*, until recently, played on the tourists' superficial expectations and the Polynesian mystique but reversed them and charged them with the dread of Polynesia's societal collapse. If the PCC characterizes its other sections as a living museum, the Marquesan *tohua* was the dead zone. The Marquesan exhibit conveyed not the energy of Polynesia alive, but the destruction and depopulation that befell the grand but hapless Marquesans.

The impression of proximity and uniformity connoted by the center's villages suddenly suggested a threat of destruction for all Polynesian societies. The Marquesans appeared not as an isolated case, but as typical of all Polynesia, despite the necessary contrast between the *tohua* and the rest of the villages and the night show. The dread of complete destruction was relieved, however, by the *tohua's* placement in the middle of the village track. This assured that those who entered its sad rendition of the center's theme would then pass through the gaiety of the other villages and be uplifted and encouraged by a renewed Polynesian vitality, which is then fulfilled in the lavish night show.

The establishment and destruction of great ancient civilizations is also the plot of the Book of Mormon. It is the saga of the rise and fall of ancient North and South American societies, but it also foretells their restoration to greatness and God's grace (1 Nephi 15:14; Ether 13:7–8).⁴ Textually, the Book of Mormon is an allegory of life, death, and resurrection. Its narrative structure differs from the more familiar conflict-climax-resolution pattern common in non-Mormon narratives. In Mormon art and ritual, postclimax is not simply resolution, it is apotheosis.

The Mormon aesthetic follows from the Mormon perspective of the world and mortal life, and it is the underlying meaning of the PCC. The villages with their allegorical A-B-A pattern of carefree happiness, the intrusion of sorrow and loss, and the refrain of happiness, all of which are finally eclipsed by the climactic spectacle of the night show, is typical of the Mormon habit of seeing heaven as the culmination of every material, every mortal operation (D&C 59:21). The PCC is unique in Mormon expression, however, in that it exposes millions of non-Mormons to the typical form and content of Mormon art and ritual.

The PCC supplies a Polynesian syntax to the cyclical message of societal rise, fall, and glorious restoration using its villages and night show as formal aesthetic elements. The narrative thread repeated with variations throughout the villages, the *tohua*, and the night show is the looming

dread of the precipitous destruction of Polynesian society and culture, and by extension all society and every mortal soul, unless they can somehow be saved. In its daily routines, the center itself and the Mormon church emerge as preservers, as the saviors of more than traditional Polynesia (eg, PCC 1987, np).

The Marquesan exhibit does not introduce this theme, but it clarifies it. The threat of the impending loss of Polynesian art and tradition is mentioned or implied in other villages, the night show, and the center's brochures, with reference to the center and the church as institutions dedicated to preserving "the best" of Polynesian culture and preventing its outright loss (Stanton 1989, 251). But these other warnings are virtually lost amid the gaiety of dance, throbbing drums, and youthful humor. In the Marquesan *tohua* looms the destruction of Polynesia, and the night show is the boisterous declaration of Polynesia's promise of renewed greatness, leaving the Mormon PCC itself as the implicit last hope of saving the vanishing past.

CYCLICAL JOURNEYS

The cyclical aesthetic of Mormonism also appears in Mormon expression as a journey motif that is central to Mormon history and symbolism. The Book of Mormon, for instance, recounts stories of a series of families guided by God across oceans from the Near East to promised lands in the Americas over a period of several thousand years. But it is important to remember that these are journeys of return. Mormons believe that Eden and all the generations of humanity up to Noah were located on what is now the American continent (D&C 116, 117:8). Noah's passage on the flood relocated the human race to the Near East, leaving the New World uninhabited, a sacred and promised land that could not be approached without the guidance of God (2 Nephi 1:6). As Hansen states, "The term 'New World' was in fact a misnomer because America was really the cradle of man and civilization" (1981, 67). According to Mormon doctrine, the civilizations identified in the Book of Mormon as being brought by God to the New World are only returning to the land of their ancestors.

The Mormon journey motif is always cyclical. Even the Mormon "exodus" from the Midwest to Utah, like Israel's sojourn in Egypt and the Diaspora, is really just a temporary exile. The Mormons expect one day to return as a group to Missouri, which they believe to be the original site of Eden (D&C 101:16-20, 117:8-9).

The Book of Mormon also tells the story of Hagoth, a shipbuilder who in about 55 BC embarked from the American continent with many others of his now fallen civilization on a series of ocean voyages from which they ultimately did not return (Alma 63:5–8). Remarkably, the Mormon church contends that Hagoth made his way from the Americas to some Pacific island and that his descendants migrated from there throughout Polynesia. This belief developed concurrently with the church's success in Hawai'i and has created an abiding affinity among Mormons for Polynesians (Britsch 1986, xiv, 97–98; Bock 1941, 58; Cole and Jensen 1961, 388). The "discovery" by Mormon prophets that the Polynesians are Hagoth's descendants renders them returned, in a sense, and the Hagoth cycle, commenced in the Book of Mormon, is completed in the PCC where the lost have been regained and glorified.

The entire PCC suggests the journey motif. The cultures it depicts are evidence of the migrations and navigational prowess of the ancient Polynesians; the tourists become their successors, and the center's layout calls for them to move on land or water to see representations of a large portion of the globe. PCC brochures collapse distance and time by inviting tourists to visit all Polynesia in a single afternoon within the center's boundaries (PCC 1987, np; 1992, np). Travel through time and space is the compelling advertisement that makes the PCC profitable.

The village track restates the Book of Mormon cyclical journey pattern, with the tourists themselves making the Hagoth voyage. But heaven itself, above and separated from earth like the night show from the villages, is the final goal for Mormonism's cyclical orientation to mortality. Those who prove themselves worthy by enduring life's joys and sorrows and perform good works will enter heaven's superlative realms (D&C 63:20; 76:70).

CONCLUSION

With the lavish night show at one end of the Polynesian Cultural Center and the vibrant villages in the middle, the gloom of the Marquesan *tobua* was a counterweight to the night show, adding aesthetic balance to the rest of the center. It was established as a memorial to Polynesian demise, portraying a dead past in contrast to the flashy, commercial exuberance of the night show. Its weighty presence touched every other area of the center just as the night show still does, but in an opposite yet structurally equivalent way. Both play on the common preconceptions of Polynesian liveli-

ness and good nature, but one depicts this vitality with sparkling pagantry, while the other portrayed its stark absence.

Tourists entered the PCC villages and found a lively enactment of their fondest preconceptions of Polynesian life styles. This experience heightened the emotionalism in the unexpected message of destruction in the Marquesan *tohua*. Retiring from the *tohua* and proceeding to the other villages and finally the night show was a relief from the somber message of the Marquesans and gave the appearance that the cultures of the other islands are alive and prospering, thanks to the intervention of the PCC.

It only appears, however, that the PCC is preserving these cultures. Actually, it is preserving popular notions of Polynesia, because the PCC is a business, its claims of cultural preservation notwithstanding. Onto the tourists' expectations of Polynesian simplicity of which the villages, the *tohua*, and the night show are variations, the PCC grafts a Mormon allegory. Fundamentally, then, the PCC is Mormon art, but it is also undeniably tourist art. That remarkable dual aesthetic reveals an unsuspected capacity of tourist art to carry deep religious themes and follow religious forms.

As with all art, artistic choices define the center's intentions, purposes, and degree of mastery. Other designs could have accommodated its villages, pavilion, and other facilities. For instance, the theater and the villages might form a circular track around a central lagoon, giving the night show and the villages equal aesthetic prominence. This layout is, in fact, similar to the PCC's original arrangement before the Pacific Pavilion was constructed as part of a park expansion in the mid-1970s (PCC 1968?, np). Or, in a star-shaped pattern, the theater might occupy the central position and be surrounded by the villages. This arrangement is familiar from Disneyland, to which the PCC has often been unflatteringly compared.

These alternate arrangements are logical and basically satisfying. But they do not establish an aesthetically charged hierarchy of decisive closures. Nor do they allow the *tohua* to be placed in spatial opposition to the night show, which intensifies their tonal opposition as variations of the theme. As such, the circle and the star patterns do not accommodate allegorical Mormon meanings nearly as well as the existing elliptical shape with its two foci. This latter pattern develops the strongest possible contrast between the villages and the night show, thus making their underlying unity more aesthetically powerful.

In my interpretation of the PCC, I have avoided the so-called intentional

fallacy that attributes the ultimate meaning of an artwork to its creator's intentions. Over thirty years, many individuals have contributed to the evolution of the center. It is unlikely that the craftsmen, artists, choreographers, and prophets involved in the establishment and development of the PCC planned it as the work of Mormon art cum tourist art it has turned out to be, formalized, varied, and unified as it has been described here. But this interpretation of the PCC proceeds from a view prevalent in modern aesthetics that only meticulous observation of a work's content can yield the correct interpretation. Authorial intentions, and historical and other background information about the work, only help illuminate the internal evidence.

Working from the hypothesis that the PCC is a single, complex work of art and not a random assortment of attractions, the internal evidence indicates that the center does not owe its form to thirty years of happenstance. Rather, the PCC developed from Mormon economic priorities and was influenced by the narrative patterns of sacred texts that follow an aesthetic of rise, fall, and glorious restoration, which lend themselves well to Mormonism's fascination with Polynesia. Because this fascination also happens to be shared by tourists from around the world, the PCC has become immensely profitable.

AFTERWORD

Anthropological studies of tourist art have often been harsh and have mainly treated it only as an economic commodity or as an indicator of culture change or culture loss. The PCC, however, is an example of how tourist art can be endowed with more than economic values, and it has much to teach about the complex function of tourist art in a developing society. The presence of strong religious significance in the PCC demonstrates the capacity of tourist art to carry deep meanings. Not only does this capacity elevate tourist art as a form of artistic expression, but it also greatly enhances the study of tourist art as an indicator of cultural values. A more even-minded anthropology of tourist art may shed light on the developmental patterns of any new art form, from the economic, through the aesthetic, to the ideological.

Nevertheless, tourist art forms are especially subject to rapid transformation, decay, or complete disappearance, because they cater to the capricious tastes of tourists. The PCC is hardly immune to this process.

Recently, its formal clarity was significantly damaged by the inflation of the program in the Marquesan *tohua*. Like the other villages, the Marquesan exhibit now features costumed villagers, chant, weaving, and "songs of the isles." It even offers a special "serenade" for tourist couples celebrating their honeymoons or anniversaries (PCC 1992, np).

The center's revenues have slumped in recent years, and new attractions have been introduced to raise attendance. These include the transformation of an orientation center into a souvenir "marketplace," the construction of a large-screen "IMAX" theater showing a film dramatization of prehistoric Polynesian migrations, and the reintroduction of a "luau," which was popular with the tourists years ago but was discontinued in favor of the Gateway Restaurant.

As part of these efforts to maximize the productivity of the center's resources, enlivening the *tohua* may make a more profitable use of a visually striking area on the center's grounds. In fact, although the Marquesan culture suffered severe population decreases as a result of contact with Europeans, it is more vibrant than the center portrayed when the *tohua* opened. Center officials have said that the *tohua* is now more accurate because the Marquesans really are not so "lost" after all. But even if the Marquesans may not have entirely disappeared as a people because of European contact, there is no denying that the culture was severely damaged. It is that poignant message that is now lost at the PCC.

The formerly somber *tohua* jolted thoughtful visitors to an awareness of the modern reality of culture loss. The exhibit's emphasis on Marquesan disappearance was not unlike other liberties taken by the center to enhance the tourists' experience. Speaking aesthetically, the Marquesan exhibit added a striking formal element to the center's structure as a coherent work of tourist art. To that same degree, then, enlivening the Marquesan exhibit dilutes the poignant, doleful message of the *tohua* and undercuts the somberness of Polynesian loss, with all its social and allegorical implications. As the exhibit becomes just like the touristic fare of the rest of the park, the center's important lesson of cultural fragility is diminished and its aesthetic as tourist art and as Mormon art is compromised.

The artistic dimension of the PCC may often be completely lost. For example, a circuit court judge in Honolulu recently ruled that the center's village operation constitutes a commercial enterprise, a tourist attraction, not a museum or church, and is therefore taxable (Titcomb 1992). The

center's battles to preserve its tax exemption as a cultural, religious non-profit institution began in 1975, when the Internal Revenue Service sought to revoke the nonprofit status. That ten-year battle ended in the center's favor (Ferre 1988, 154–156, 187). If the final outcome of the current litigation is against the PCC, the cost in back taxes could be considerable. The recent alterations in the center's aesthetic form and content could compromise the PCC as a meaningful work of art played on a religious theme, with potential repercussions for the university it funds.

Notes

1 This study does not examine the Polynesian Cultural Center as an artifact frozen in time. In its thirty years, the center has undergone several enlargements and countless other changes in details of village and night-show operations. It is across the changes, however, that the larger, persistent form and meaning emerge. Center publications, mainly brochures, are valuable primary resources and are especially useful to study the evolution of the center. Because the Polynesian Cultural Center changes, its evolution must figure in its interpretation. When available for study, the early versions of any artwork, the sketches and the drafts, help reveal the work's direction and unity. So it is with the Polynesian Cultural Center.

2 In Lā'ie, the Polynesian Cultural Center is commonly called the "PCC," rather than "the center." I will use both, however, to avoid a repetitious use of one or the other.

3 Interview quotations are from an extensive and ongoing series of discussions with employees of the center, residents of Lā'ie, tourists, church leaders, administrators, and faculty of Brigham Young University—Hawai'i that began in 1985 as part of my dissertation research. Names of respondents are confidential.

4 References to Mormon scriptural works appear as follows: the component books of the Book of Mormon are named without abbreviation followed by chapter and verse; D&C indicates the Doctrine and Covenants, the divisions of which are sections and verses, eg, D&C 76:31.

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Abstract

The Polynesian Cultural Center in Lā'ie, Hawai'i, is a popular and profitable ethnic theme park established by the Mormon church. The center's management claims the park is a living museum that preserves the traditional arts of several Polynesian societies. But the center's commercial purposes, large tourist audiences, and manner of presentation clearly place it in the category of a tourist attraction. As such, the center has been criticized by anthropologists and other experts for its superficiality and lack of authenticity. Aesthetic analysis of the center, however, reveals a theme and variation form that unifies the center's components into a single, complex work of tourist art. When examined as a unified artwork, the center exhibits an aesthetic that is distinctly Mormon. Its messages are the fundamental tenets of Mormonism. Although religiosity is hardly uncommon in fine art and even folk art, in tourist art it is remarkable. The present study leaves aside the continuing controversy over the center's authenticity versus its commercialism to introduce an aesthetic interpretation of the center's form and meaning. In so doing, the study offers insight into an unexpected capacity of tourist art to carry deep religious meanings.